



DEBRA BOWEN

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Secretary of State Debra Bowen Laments Governor's View That Voters' Rights Measures Are Not 'Highest Priority'

SACRAMENTO – Secretary of State Debra Bowen today voiced her disappointment in the Governor's decision to veto six voter-friendly bills and characterize them as not being a high priority for California right now.

Following the record-setting budget impasse, the Governor has said he will only sign bills that are of "the highest priority for California." The Governor wrote in his veto messages that the voters' rights measures did "not meet that standard."

"I'm dismayed the Governor doesn't believe it is a high priority to let voters know about their polling-place rights or if their votes were counted," said Secretary Bowen, California's chief elections officer. "I understand the governor is not fond of the Legislature these days, but it's California voters who are being punished."

The governor vetoed Assembly Bill 2964 (Levine), which would have allowed vote-by-mail voters to find out if their ballots were counted and, if not, why not. More than 40% of the ballots cast in recent elections have been by mail.

Vote-by-mail ballots can go uncounted for two main reasons: Some arrive after the polls close at 8:00 p.m. on Election Day and cannot be counted legally. Others are rejected because the signature on the ballot envelope does not match the signature on file during the verification process. Both age and disability can change a voter's signature. If voters had information about why their mail-in ballots were not counted, they could make changes that would prevent their votes from being cast aside in the future.

The governor also vetoed AB 2953 (Feuer), which would have told Californians who "decline to state" a political party affiliation about their voting rights in primary elections. Nearly one in five Californians decline to state a political party affiliation, and they make up the fastest growing group of voters in the state.

In February, two of California's six qualified political parties allowed nonpartisan voters to take part in their presidential primaries; the other four parties kept their primaries "closed." On Election Day, there were scattered reports of DTS voters who could not cast a ballot for their preferred presidential candidates because poll workers or voters themselves were confused about the voting rights of DTS voters.

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Under AB 2953, poll workers would have been required to notify DTS voters in writing of their right to ask for a partisan ballot from any party that opens its primary to DTS participation.

In addition, the governor vetoed these other voter rights bills:

- AB 1928 (Anderson), which would have required counties to inform vote-by-mail voters that their ballots must be received before the polls close on Election Day.
- AB 2584 (Mendoza), which would have made it easier for people who had signed initiative, recall, or referendum petitions to remove their names from them.
- AB 3014 (Mullin), which would have clarified the length of time a voter may legally remain in a voting booth on Election Day.
- Senate Bill 1694 (Florez), which, like AB 2953, would have required poll workers to provide DTS voters written notice of their rights to request some parties' partisan ballots in primary elections.

The last day for eligible Californians to register to vote in the November 4, 2008, General Election is October 20. The last day to request a vote-by-mail ballot is October 28.

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